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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the relationship between reading and writing skills and their development in both native English-speakers (NES) and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Subjects were 150 NES students, English majors in American universities, and 150 EFL students enrolled in schools of education at four Egyptian universities. Data were gathered using standardized reading comprehension and writing tests designed for either native speakers or non-native speakers of English. Results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between NES students' reading and writing scores, but no statistically significant correlation for EFL students. It is suggested that this difference between the two groups may be due to teaching methods of NES and EFL teachers, differences in language proficiency levels, or language use outside the classroom. Implications for instruction include the need for more integrated instruction of reading and writing, simultaneous teaching of reading and writing from the beginning of language instruction, better preparation of English teachers to read like writers and write like readers, and understanding of the gaps between receptive and productive skills. Contains 57 references. (MSE)

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Exploring the reading-writing relationship in NES and EFL students

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Abstract

Both language teaching theorists and curriculum specialists have recently directed increased attention to the reading-writing relationship. Some claim that information can transfer from reading to writing and vice versa. Others claim that reading is independent of writing. This study, therefore, sought to explore the reading-writing relationships in both native English-speaking (NES) and English as a foreign language (EFL) students. The study used an equal number of NES and EFL students. Data were gathered through measures of both reading and writing for the two groups of the study. Statistical analysis of the data was carried out through the use of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The results of the study revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$) between reading and writing in NES students and no significant correlation in EFL students ($r = 0.07$, $p =$ n. s.). These results were discussed in terms of what they mean to planners of EFL curricula. Finally, directions for future research were stated.

Problem of the study

This study was undertaken to explore the reading-writing relationship in both NES and EFL students. Specifically, the question asked was whether there would be a statistically significant correlation between reading and writing in both NES and EFL students.

Significance of the study

It was hoped that this study would contribute to an understanding of the normal relationship that should exist between reading and writing in EFL students. This study was also expected to help EFL teachers to advance their students towards native-like uses of both reading and writing. Most importantly, research in the area of reading-writing relationship, as Stotsky (1983: 672) states, is "necessary if we are to guide curriculum development in reading and writing more soundly and, hence, more effectively." More specifically, in the absence of research on the reading-writing relationship, isolation or integration of both skills would be risky.

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Theoretical background to the study

Influenced by the neuropsychologists who hold that comprehension is located in one area of the brain and production in another, some educators claim that reading and writing are unequal. That is, the two skills are linguistically and pedagogically very different from each other. The following extracts show this point of view:

> In child language, both observational and research evidence point to the "superiority" of comprehension over production: children understand "more" than they actually produce. For instance, a child may understand a sentence with an embedded relative in it, but not be able to produce one. (Brown 1987: 26-27).

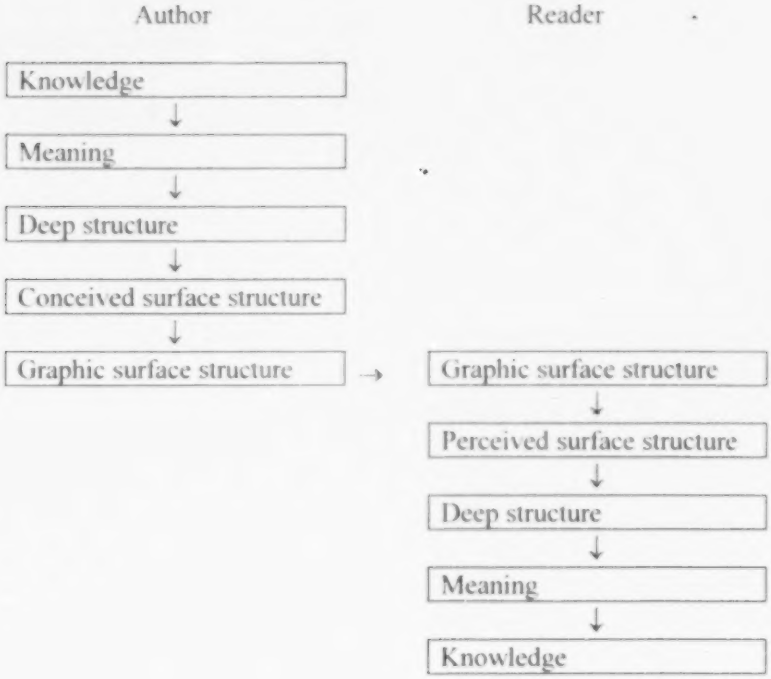
> The primary difference between the two activities [reading and writing] is that writing depends on more detailed analyzed knowledge. The required degree of analyzed knowledge about sound-spelling relationships is greater when expressively spelling words than when receptively recognizing them. Similarly, vague notions of discourse structure may be adequate to interpret written texts but are decidedly inadequate to produce it. (Bialystock and Ryan 1985: 224-225).

> The receptive skill of reading is much more easily acquired and more easily retained than the productive skill of writing. But the learning of reading also has special characteristics that relate to its institutional or **langue** nature. The learner must know how to respond as a reader to writing of many different types, of many different degrees of difficulty, recorded at different times and in different places. Writing, on the contrary, like speaking, is a highly personal affair, in which the learner must respect all the mandatory features of the target language code as it appears when written, while at the same time being permitted and encouraged to exploit the volitional and creative aspects of the new language to the extent that his ability and his experience permit. (Brooks 1964: 167).

In a similar vein, some educators claim that a writer and a reader of a text follow inverse cognitive processes (e. g., Beaugrande 1979, Page 1974, Yoos 1979). More specifically, they view reading as a bottom-up phenomena and

writing as a top-down process. Figure 1 below, for example, represents Page's view in this point. (p. 176).

Figure 1: Page's concept of reading and writing



The previously-mentioned standpoint resulted in fragmented curriculum development and isolated skill instruction. That is, reading and writing are often treated as separate entities in the classrooms as well as language arts curricula particularly at the college level. Furthermore, most of the empirical studies in the two skills, as Joy Reid (1993: 43) states, "progressed so independently for the past twenty years" In other words, most of the researchers limited their studies to only one of the two skills.

Other educators, on the contrary, argue that both reading and writing are potentially equal and integrated. Some (e. g., Gersten and Liberman 1979, Hill 1979, Shephered 1973, Simmons 1977 and Taylor 1981) have expoused the view that the subskills of both reading and writing are virtually the same. As shown in

Figure 2, for example, Taylor (1981: 30-31) claims that the subskills of reading and writing are virtually identical.

Figure 2: Taylor's subskills of reading and writing

Reading	Writing
Identifying the main idea	Formulating and phrasing the main idea
Finding support for the main idea	Supporting the main idea
Recognizing the sequence of sentences	Linking sentences to achieve coherence
Drawing inferences	Shaping inferences
Following organization of ideas and events	Arranging ideas and events in the logical order
Differentiating fact from opinion	Supporting an opinion with facts
Recognizing organizational patterns	Using appropriate organizational patterns
Drawing conclusions from ideas, stated or inferred	Writing deductively
Drawing conclusions from detail	Writing inductively
Detecting causal relationships	Analyzing a causal chain

In the same vein, some educators describe reading and writing in these ways: as reciprocal acts of comprehending and composing (e. g., Indrisano 1984, Moffet and Wagner 1983, Petrosky 1982, Zamel 1992), as similar patterns of thinking (e. g., Bartholomae and Petrosky 1986, Janopoulos 1986, Rosenblatt 1988, Sternglass 1986), as aspects of the same activity (Singh 1989), as mutually reinforcing interactive processes (e. g., Flood and Lapp 1987, Kucer 1987, Morris 1981), and as two sides of the same basic process (Squire 1983). Furthermore, some educators claim that reading and writing activate schemata about the

language, content and form of the topic which consequently influence what is produced or understood in a text (e. g., Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, and Goets 1977, Hays and Tierney 1981, Tierney and Pearson 1983). The previously-mentioned assumptions have led some educators to see that reading and writing are complementary and that the teaching of reading involves the teaching of writing and vice versa. As Kenneth and Yetta Goodman (1983: 592) argue: "... people not only learn to read by reading and write by writing but they also learn to read by writing and write by reading." To conclude the discussion of the theoretical background, the researcher has seen that current theories in reading and writing reflect considerable controversy over the relationship between the two skills. These conflicting theories point toward the need for a continuation of research efforts to determine the relationship between the two skills with different samples and in different situations.

Research literature

The research literature in this study was reviewed with respect to only the reading-writing relationship in NES students since there is currently no research on this relationship in EFL students. Research on the reading-writing relationship in NES students has yielded three controversial findings. One set of studies has shown that there are strong correlations between measures of reading and writing. That is, good readers are good writers and vice versa (e.g., Applebee 1977, Campbell 1976, Chomsky 1973, D'Angelo 1977, Heil 1976, Hill 1982, Holtz 1987, Kane 1983, Popplewell 1984, Simmons 1977, Thomas 1976). The second set has found no positive correlations between measures of reading and writing which support the view that the two skills differ sharply from each other (e. g., Evans 1979, Fuller 1974, Perry 1980, Siedow 1973). The third set has found relatively low correlations between reading and writing which support the view that there are some skills specific to reading and others common to both (Webster and Ammon 1994). As indicated earlier, studies in the reading-writing relationship in NES students are inconclusive and reflect the previously-mentioned conflicting theories. Although most of these studies have shown a positive correlation between reading and writing, there is some evidence for just the opposite. Furthermore, there is no research examining this relationship in EFL students. It certainly seems worthwhile to continue the investigations in this area to compare and/or contrast the reading-writing relationships in NES and EFL students. Therefore, it was the purpose of the current study to further investigate this relationship in both NES and EFL students.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at $p < 0.05$ level of significance: 1) There is no relationship between reading and writing in NES students. 2) There is no relationship between reading and writing in EFL students.

Methodology

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 150 NES students and 150 EFL students. The NES students were volunteers from English majors enrolled in four American universities (Memphis State University, Mississippi State University, The University of Mississippi, The University of Southern Mississippi) in the 1995/1996 academic year. The EFL students were randomly drawn from students enrolled in the department of English at four faculties of education in Egypt (Al-Arish Faculty of Education, Ismailia Faculty of Education, Menoufia Faculty of Education, Suez Faculty of Education) in the 1996/1997 academic year. The NES students were approximately the same age as EFL students (M= 21.38 years, SD= 6.43 vs. M= 20.92, SD= 5.67).

Instruments

Four instruments were used in this study. Two of them (The Nelson-Denny Comprehension Test, form B, and a TWE essay prompt[1]) were used with native English-speaking students. The other two (The TOEFL reading comprehension, subtest 5, part B, and the TOEFL essay writing, subtest 5, part 4) were used with EFL students. The TOEFL was used with EFL students because the correlation coefficient, as reported by Hosley and Meredith (1979: 213), was greater than 0.05 for "the scores on the reading comprehension and writing ability subtests ($r = 0.61$)." The data collection for both NES and EFL students was done by the researcher. In both cases the reading and writing tests were administered over a two-day period to ensure that language learning between measure administrations would not significantly affect the results of the study.

Scoring

The reading comprehension tests used in the study were scored by the researcher according to their own answer keys. The essays written by NES students were scored using the TWE scoring guide (1989), and those written by EFL students were scored using the TOEFL scoring guide. Following the criteria included in these scales, each essay was scored by two raters (working independently). One of them was a native speaker of English and the other was the investigator. Essays with scores that differed by two or more points were read by a third rater and the extreme score was dropped. The score for each essay was the average of two raters — either the first two raters, or, in case in which a third rater

was required the average of the third rater and the closest score. Prior to scoring, the researcher met with the other two raters. At this meeting the criteria contained in the scoring guides were discussed and studied and then ten compositions written by students not included in this study were scored by the three raters for the purpose of conducting interrater reliability. The obtained correlation coefficients were: 0.80 between raters # 1 and # 2, 0.85 between raters # 1 and # 3, and 0.76 between raters # 2 and # 3. These coefficients indicate a high inter-rater reliability among the three raters.

Analysis of the data

Table 1
Pearson product moment correlation coefficient for reading and writing in NES students

Variables	N.	M	SD	Correlation Coefficient
Reading	150	4.47	1.24	0.61
Writing	150	4.23	1.21	

As indicated in Table 1, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between NES students' reading scores and their writing scores ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2
Pearson product moment correlation coefficient for reading and writing in EFL students

Variables	N	M	SD	Correlation Coefficient
Reading	150	4.13	1.26	0.07
Writing	150	3.10	1.31	

As indicated in Table 2, there was no statistically significant correlation between EFL students' reading scores and their writing scores ($r = 0.07$, $p =$ n. s.). Therefore, the second null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

The difference in the reading-writing relationship between NES and EFL students may be due to the teaching methods adopted by NES and EFL teachers. Seemingly, NES teachers attend equally to both reading and writing and always

ask their students to write research reports individually, or in groups about what they read. Egyptian EFL teachers, on the contrary, still deal with the two skills as separate entities or disciplines in separate periods of time. And this in turn suggests that instruction in reading is not beneficial to writing or vice versa unless both skills are integrated. In other words, it is unlikely that transfer from reading to writing or vice versa will occur unless we teach for it or coordinate between the two skills in the classrooms. This interpretation is supported by Gordon and Braun's (1982: 267) conclusions which show that "when an instructional method is designed to deliberately enhance and facilitate transfer, children [or adults] readily apply story schema to related reading and writing tasks."

A second reason for the difference in the reading-writing relationships between NES and EFL students may be language proficiency levels. That is, EFL students' low language proficiency may hinder this transfer. This interpretation is indirectly supported by Loban's longitudinal study (1963: 79) in which he followed 211 school children from kindergarten through grade twelve. He (Loban) concluded that the relationship between reading and writing increased across grades 4, 6, and 9.

A final reason for the difference in the reading-writing relationships between NES and EFL students may be language use outside the classroom. This everyday use of the language may coordinate what NES students produce with what they understand. As Clark and Hecht (1983: 338) argue: "Everyday uses of language depend on coordinating what we can produce . . . with what we understand. . . . Without such coordination, we could not make full use of the conventional nature of language. . . .We have suggested that production and comprehension do not come already coordinated. Children may understand words and expressions before they come to produce them appropriately, and they may produce many expressions that they only partially understand. One task during acquisition is to coordinate their comprehension and production." Conversely, EFL students use of English is limited to the classroom in which reading and writing are still viewed as separate disciplines.

Implications for instruction

Since reading and writing were found to be correlated in NES students, the overriding implication is that the integration of both skills in EFL classrooms and language arts curricula is essential to advance EFL students toward native-like uses of both skills. Such integration can be implemented through such tasks as the following:

*Asking students to read each other's writing and respond to it.

*Asking students to pause to scan and read during writing.

*Asking students to write summaries, syntheses and critiques about what they read.
*Using the reading materials that teach various organizational patterns.
*Using journal writing as a technique to teach reading and writing.
*Using nonfiction literature in the composition classroom.

A second implication is that EFL teachers do not have to postpone writing until reading ability fully develops. In other words, reading and writing should be taught together from the very beginning of learning English as a foreign language.

A third implication is that colleges of education should prepare teachers who are capable of integrating reading and writing by asking students to read like a writer and to write like a reader (Kroll 1993).

A fourth implication is that EFL students' "inability to produce an item . . . should not be taken to mean that . . . [they] cannot comprehend the item." (Brown 1987: 55). So teaching English as a foreign language should involve "attending to both comprehension and production and the full consideration of the gaps and differences between the two." (Brown 1987: loc. cit.).

Recommendations for future research

Further research in the following areas is needed to extend the findings of the study: 1) Replicating the study with larger and more diverse samples. 2) Determining the relationship between reading and writing in EFL students at different stages. 3) Identifying the factors that affect the reading-writing relationship over time. 4) Exploring the effects of integrated reading-writing instruction on students' attitudes towards both skills. 5) Exploring the effects of reading-to-write vs. writing-to-read on the reading and writing achievement of EFL students at different levels.

Endnote

[1] The prompt read: It is generally agreed that society benefits from the work of its members. Compare the contributions of artists to society with the contributions of scientists. Which type of contribution do you think is valued by your society? Give specific reasons to support your answer. (Cited in Connor and Carrell 1993: 145).

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